

Message Text

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66-61

ACTION EB-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 FEA-02 SCI-06 CIEP-02

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6561

INFO USMISSION EC BRUSSELS UNN

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AMEMBASSY BERN

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TGEN, TECH, EC

SUBJECT: ENERGY: FRENCH FAST BREEDER BECOMES A REALITY

REF: PARIS A-71, FEBRUARY 1, 1974

FOLLOWING IS SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF REFERENCE AIRGRAM BEING SENT TO ADDRESSEES.

" THE FRENCH ARE A SHORT STEP AWAY FROM SCORING A TECHNOLOGICAL SUCCESS WHICH MAY PLACE THEM IN WESTERN WORLD LEAD IN DEVELOPING THE FAST BREEDER POWER REACTOR. THIS NEW TECHNOLOGY IS GENERALLY LOOKED ON AS A VITAL ELEMENT IN WORLD ENERGY PRODUCTION AFTER 1985. THE FRENCH DEMONSTRATION FAST BREEDER REACTOR, THE PHENIX, WHICH

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FIRST WENT CRITICAL ON AUGUST 31, 1973, IS NOW PRODUCING 100

MEGAWATTS OF ELECTRICAL POWER. ITS DESIGNERS SAY THAT THEY HAVE MET NO SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN INCREASING ITS POWER GRADUALLY AND EXPECT THAT BY MID-SPRING THE PHENIX WILL BE PRODUCING AT NORMAL OPERATING POWER OF ABOUT 233 MEGAWATTS. THE SUCCESS TO DATE OF THE PHENIX DEVELOPMENT APPEARS TO RESULT, NOT FROM A MYSTERIOUS SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH, BUT FROM EXCELLENT TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES, AMPLE PROGRAM FUNDING, GOOD LEADERSHIP AND HIGH STAFF MORALE. THE REAL PROOF OF FRENCH BREEDER TECHNOLOGY, HOWEVER, WILL NOT COME UNTIL IT IS TESTED IN THE WORLD MARKET OF THE 1980'S AND 1990'S. THOUGH PROBABLY SEVERAL YEARS AHEAD OF THE US, UK AND FRG PROGRAMS, THE FRENCH BREEDER PROGRAM STILL FACES SERIOUS CHALLENGES. CAN THEIR BREEDER REACTOR COMPETE COMMERCIALY WITH CONVENTIONAL REACTORS? WILL IT MEET STRINGENT SAFETY DEMANDS THAT WILL PROBABLY BE SET FOR THIS NEW TECHNOLOGY? THE ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION WILL BE YES ONLY IF THE BREEDER IS BUILT IN LARGE ENOUGH NUMBERS TO BRING DOWN ITS COSTS. FOR THE FRENCH THIS MEANS THE EXPORT MARKET. AS THE UK AND FRG ALREADY HAVE WELL DEVELOPED BREEDER PROGRAMS OF THEIR OWN, WE SUSPECT THAT THE FRENCH ARE HOPING TO SELL THEIR BREEDER TECHNOLOGY TO THE US MARKET. THEY ARE ALREADY RECEIVING A STEADY STREAM OF VISITS FROM US ENGINEERING FIRMS. END SUMMARY."

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